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The situation in the Middle East

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Identical letters dated 11 October 2016 from the representatives of Canada, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

We have the honour to write to you on behalf of 62 Member States, namely, Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Yemen, to express outrage and horror at the dangerous escalation of violence throughout the city of Aleppo and its continued besiegement. We echo the Secretary-General's condemnation on 24 September 2016 of the appalling military escalation in Aleppo and join the calls upon the international community, through the Security Council, to fulfil its responsibility to use appropriate means to help protect the people of Syria from mass atrocities, save civilians from the scourge of war and end the senseless violence in Syria.

Since the Syrian authorities announced the launch of an offensive to capture eastern Aleppo on 22 September 2016, there has been a significant escalation of indiscriminate attacks, bombing and shelling on civilians and civilian facilities, as well as repeated reports of an escalation of indiscriminate air strikes, using incendiary weapons and advanced munitions such as "bunker-busting" bombs. Civilians and the infrastructure the civilians depend on for their livelihood are being struck in a very calculated campaign. As the Secretary-General has underlined,

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"those using ever more destructive weapons know exactly what they are doing. They know they are committing war crimes".

The most recent sharp escalation in violence in eastern Aleppo has caused hundreds of civilian casualties, including the deaths of rescue workers, women and more than 100 children. Medical facilities, medical workers and patients have been repeatedly bombed. It has to be recalled that deliberate attacks on hospitals are war crimes, denying people access to essential health care violates international humanitarian law and that medical missions enjoy special protection under international humanitarian law. As the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs stated in his remarks to the Security Council on 29 September 2016, "east Aleppo this minute is not at the edge of the precipice; it is well into its terrible descent into the pitiless and merciless abyss of a humanitarian catastrophe unlike any we have witnessed in Syria". In western Aleppo, attacks have also been launched by non-state armed groups, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries.

We call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular to cease all acts of violence against civilians, and to uphold their responsibilities, as prescribed in Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2254 (2015), 2258 (2015), 2268 (2016) and 2286 (2016). We furthermore call upon the Security Council and the international community to uphold their responsibility to use appropriate means to help protect Syrian civilians from mass atrocities, to ensure immediate, full, unimpeded, safe and sustained humanitarian access in Syria and the free movement of peoples into and out of Aleppo and across Syria, in particular to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas, to promote accountability for crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity and to take the necessary measures to restore the cessation of hostilities, by ensuring that violations to the cessation are closely monitored. Monitoring should be transparent and qualitative, and violations should be met with consequences.

There is no military solution to the conflict. We, therefore, call upon all actors in Syria to engage constructively in a political process that leads to a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Too often in the face of atrocities in Syria, the Security Council has failed to achieve consensus and the international community has failed to uphold its responsibility to protect civilians. As the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs has stated, the Security Council risks being "on the wrong side of history and on the wrong side of avoidable deaths".

We would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated to all Member States as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Michael **Grant**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

(*Signed*) François **Delattre**
Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Mansour Ayyad Sh. **Al-Otaibi**
Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Karel J. G. **van Oosterom**
Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmed Saif **Al-Thani**
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(*Signed*) Abdallah Y. **Al-Mouallimi**
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(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
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(*Signed*) Samantha **Power**
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